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Kenneth Anger:

FROM: CHANGES, JULY 1973

Scorpio Rises Again

By NEIL BALDWIN

One evening in mid April, Kenneth Anger walked into a sweltering lecture hall on the campus of SUNY at Buffalo and confronted an expectant audience. The Department of English and Gerald O'Grady's Center for Media Studies had managed to convince Anger to make one of his rare public appearances and screenings. Stan Brakhage, in residence at UB this term, introduced his longtime friend, resplendent in a rainbow-colored silk highschool style jacket with the name "LUCIFER" emblazoned across the back in silver.

What follows is my attempt to get down what happened in the following four and a half hours. I did not have a tape recorder; this is not a transcript. But whatever I represent as Anger's words are *his. He spoke almost nonstop in a freewheeling, free-associative way, having had no sleep in two weeks and nothing to eat or drink that day but a cup of coffee.*

I've been away from the US for six years. I got over my terrific hostility towards the US. I live in London, I dig it, I have friends. But I'm getting irritated with it, with the lab technicians and their "tea-breaks."

Theodore Dreiser was a great novelist but he didn't know how to edit. He made it on sheer drive, just like the Japanese, who have now taken over from you. They have taken your place as the most energetic, obsessed, driven race of people in the world. They rape the land and they're very successful at it. I live just five minutes' walk from Sotheby's, and I can go down there and sit down and watch these Japs buy Renoirs and Manets for thousands of pounds. Oh, those Renoir women, supernaturally glowing thighs, glowing like an atomic furnace. During World War II I worked for Douglas Aircraft. You're asking yourself, what the fuck does this have to do with movies? We'll get to my movies. I hardly ever show my films for free. I'm just going to three cities, Buffalo, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, in two weeks. The only man I ever voted for, for President of the United States, was Dr. Kinsey, who worked himself to death and died in 1955. I've been making films for twenty-six years. You can fall asleep during some of these, I don't mind.

The first film we're going to see is a severely-censored version of a Hamburg TV film, a documentary about me that I dislike intensely. I wanted to make a feature film, lasting 93 minutes, but so far my longest has been 40 minutes because I just haven't had the bread to do it right. So, a Faustian deal was struck. I agreed to do this interview for German TV and in return they would pay me twenty thousand pounds so then I could do my feature, as long as they got the rights to show it on TV first, when it was done.

I won't use the word "underground"; I won't use the words "New American Cinema"; I won't use the word "experimental" – "new" is a very treacherous word. The week after, it's no longer new, sorry.

Color is very important to me. In copying a film you cut the quality of the color in half, automatically. Film is a very vulnerable medium. The Germans are my symbolical enemies. So what you're going to see is a twenty-minute remnant of that interview I did for them, because I cut out all the parts where I was being interviewed, because I detested that man who interviewed me. He offered me a joint at the beginning, as if to say, "Here, take me as I am," and I said, "no thanks," I refused. This isn't my feature film, these are clips from my other films that they used to illustrate the interview. It's called, *Kenneth Anger, or Film as Magic Ritual.*

During this screening, Anger provided running commentary and apologized for the numerous tape splices where he had cut out the substance of the interview.

I want to say that Marnau's *Faust* was a great, great inspiration to me. My producer is from Nigeria. He's a Nigerian on the make, that's the only reason he's my producer. I shot these scenes through a kitchen sieve.

Clips from Invocation of My Demon Brother, *1969.*

This scene uses overlay-shots, which are very expensive to do. It was done when my friends and I were into a turned-on bag, turned on with drugs, or naivete, or both. Brando's statement about the American Indians was far-out. I respect Brando; I respect Jane Fonda.

Clips from Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome, *1954.*

This is the only woman I ever lived with. Her name is Cameron, she's a painter. I had to coax her to play this part (The Scarlet Woman). My next film will be called *Proteus.* Now, Proteus was the god of the Jungian unconscious and he could change his shape at any given time. It will be about Aleister Crowley. Hitlerism is terribly similar to Africa. Virginia Woolf knew what was coming – that Hitler was coming – and so she walked into the water and killed herself. Marilyn Monroe killed herself because she was so upset by the pressures of the Hollywood scene. I'm a Marilyn Monroe fan. I would love to have been able to direct her.

Clip from Puce Moment, *1949.*

She (Yvonne Marquis) was wearing my grandmother's dresses. You know photo-floods are a hoax. They only last about four hours at the most, and then they burn out, and they're so goddamned expensive to replace. My first studio was what they called a small re-take sound stage, about one quarter the size of this room. I've always wanted to work in 35 mm. But I never had the bread. You can manipulate it.

Clip from Lucifer Rising, *work-in-progress, 1971-1973.*

We shot this part at Stonehenge. I'm grateful to England, because they let me work there. This shot here, the sky got black very suddenly, and there was an electrical storm of terrible beauty,

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terrible thunder and lightning. I threw a temper tantrum. So this is that Faustian bargain I told you about, like David Barley's *Portrait of Andy Warhol*, which is being vehemently protested in England.

Rain comes in my films like tears, sperm, and blood.

After a brief pause, Fireworks, *Anger's first film, made in 1947 when he was 17, was shown. He did not speak during the film. It is a blue-cast fantasy, dream-visions of sailors, smoke and fire. The cutting is sharp and structured musically, building with the deafening classical soundtrack to a bloody crescendo where the young man (Anger playing Anger) is eviscerated and beaten with chains by a horde of muscle-bound sailors.* Puce Moment *followed immediately after. Anger remarked that it was supposed to have been a fragment of a much longer film, with 25 women in the cast, but again, economics prevented him from achieving this. He described puce as a "pinky mauve" color. Yvonne Marquis as the Star and only member of the cast, languishes on a brocaded bed, drifts about her room, handling various objects with sensual grace. This film would seem to be the earliest illustration of Anger's impeccable use of color as mood.* Scorpio Rising, *1963, followed without a break. At this point Anger began his monologue again.*

The soundtrack for *Scorpio* cost me $12,000, because I had to pay all those old rock stars to use their songs in the movie, people like Rick Nelson, Ray Charles, etc. But you see this print is silent, because the sound-track was destroyed by the lab. One scene in the film was mangled beyond repair, an important death scene. Color is one of my big turnouts. Film is a terribly vulnerable medium. I promise you, you'll be back in your dormitories before midnight. I'm interested in culture. One of the reasons I'm back in this country is to try and find all those original 45's I used, and make a new track for the film. This is not the same *Scorpio Rising* you may have seen. But anyone who really wants to get into my head should see my films silent. This is the deadly Kenneth Anger tempo, slower than Andy Warhol; I'm slow, but I never let go of you. I once put Marianne Faithfull to sleep. She was very tired to begin with. And then I played *Scorpio* for her, silent, like it is here, and she remembered parts of it. The film was shot during a two-week methedrine high, made over Marie Menken's screams of protest. In *Pleasure Dome* I arranged everything, the costumes, the scenery, everything. But not here, this is real. This film is about death.

Venereal disease may be the subject of my next film. Two or three people in this room right now will get clap at some point in their lives. There is a new strain of gonorrhea that has come over from Viet Nam, and it is a killer. It hibernates in your brain for years and years and then one day it takes over your body and kills you. The V-girls in Viet Nam spread this disease deliberately to our boys. The sign of Scorpio rules the cosmic man, and he also rules war, and anal sexuality. Don't laugh, that's the way it happens to be. Scorpio is the sacred guardian of the genitals, and that includes the asshole. This is an anal film; these boys were dirty, let me tell you. I personally dig quietly virile men.

Clip from Kustom Kar Kommandos, *1965.*

These are vignettes of American boys in their favorite pasttime. Jerry Main, the star of this film, is dead now.

The next film seen was Invocation of My Demon Brother, *1969. Anger kept silent during this, partly because the soundtrack by Mick Jagger was astoundingly, violently loud, an endlessly-repetitive pattern something like a supernatural siren. Images of Woodstock and Viet Nam intercut with cabalistic, alchemical rituals. After the film was over, the room remained dark, and Anger marked time before the next film by picking up the thread of his impromptu speech once more.*

That film you just saw is about the reason I left America. Jagger was stoned when he did the soundtrack for that. It was originally done in four-track stereo, and if I ever get the bread, I'd like to do it the right way. I like to show my films for about twenty-five people, invite them to my house and give them each a magic mushroom or something – my Kenneth Anger Special, which isn't pot or anything like that, it's different, not like the stuff you're used to. I didn't dig Mick's marriage to Bianca, I told him she wasn't really from Nicaragua, that she was a teenage whore in Algeria. The only thing that keeps me alive is my bitchiness. Mick knows that. I'm not just dropping names. Mick is a terrific skeptic, one percent of him is superstitious, like in Ivory Soap. I always wondered what the fuck that one percent impurity was. The Viet Nam war is over, but I've declared war. *Lucifer Rising* is my war film. Mick got his idea for the song *Sympathy for the Devil* from my idea for this next film. He stole it from me.

We are going to see the first half hour of *Lucifer Rising*, the fine cut is the first fifteen minutes. That means it'll stay pretty much the way it is now except for mixes I might decide to add. On May 1, I'm going back to England, for May Day. *Performance* was a poisonous, negative, evil film, and Mick signed up to do it when he was stoned and he didn't know what he was doing. *Lucifer Rising* is silent now, the soundtrack will come later. Jimmy Page is doing it. He began it when he was on the road with that teeny-bop group Led Zeppelin. He's using nine instruments. I never use jazz, it's not my bag – only symphony or pop, which are very close. So while you're watching the film, think about the kinds of sounds you'd like to hear with it. I want to blow it up to 35 mm.

When the film started, Anger debated with himself whether to talk or not. After trying to get audience reaction to this, he decided he would talk. The opening credits are, "WORK IN PROGRESS THE WAR DEPARTMENT PRESENTS LUCIFER RISING." It is a stunning thing to see, so far. It begins in Egypt, among the sphynxes and temples, with Myriam Gabril (Isis) and Donald Cammell (Osiris) signalling to each other across the sands. The scenes shift to Stonehenge and the takes shown earlier in the evening; and to Iceland and the volcano erupting. Anger seems to be moving toward a much more studied, less hurried pace. There are fewer cuts than in Demon Brother. *Color is sharper and more varied, covering a spectrum from earth-tones to airy tones. Exteriors take precedence over dark interiors; thus there is a more expansive feel to the film.*

Anger also screened rough footage from the film, which featured Marianne Faithfull as Lilith. At one point she is climbing a rocky path, her dark gown billowing behind her, and her blonde hair floating on the breeze, when suddenly there is a freeze-frame, which must be the first time he has ever used that device. It is striking for its singleness.

Marianne Faithfull is one of the six women in my whole life that I have loved. Marianne is half-Jewish. She had a very hard life when she was with Mick. He is a very sophisticated sadist. Mysticism is my scene. I risked my life for this film. I don't know if that makes it any more interesting, but I did – I almost got killed trying to film that volcano. I had to bribe the ferry captain to get closer and closer to it.

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At the end of the scenes screened, a flying-saucer like object flies smoothly over an Egyptian temple. Anger drew attention to this.

This is the most important scene in my life. I recreated it on film.

It was midnight. Most of the audience left. Anger stayed to talk to about 50 people.

My parents disowned me. Like Blanche DuBois in *Streetcar Named Desire*, I trusted strangers. I intended to return to America. I would like to make a film about America. I haven't rejected the US, I still have this leftist idealist feeling that you can live together without jealousy. The Loch-ness monster rules the world. I just don't believe in evolution. If I had been a Roman Catholic my parents would have killed me. I mean it. Luckily, I'm a Presbyterian. I may end up a Catholic, though. I don't know. I respect scholarship. I look things up in thick books. People are tiresome to work with, especially when you adopt your actors and actresses. I've adopted Marianne. Every other camera, like every other car out of Detroit, is faulty.

I hate TV. I hate the bulbous image that looks like a goiter, a glass goiter. I think it's a bummer. I watched the assassinations of President Kennedy and Oswald on a laundromat TV. My clothes just kept going round and round and getting whiter and whiter. I'll never work in TV. The one exception was that German deal and the twenty thousand pounds, which I've spent now, on travelling expenses.

Streetcar really turned me on when I was about 14 or 15. Tennessee Williams is a good friend, terribly romantic. He cunningly exploits human emotions on stage.

A true rip-off artist is a genius. Like Barnum. He ripped off the whole American culture.

My father was really into hobbies. *Hobby* and *work* were two separate things.

ANGER MAGICK LANTERN CYCLE

KENNETH ANGER In Person

Featuring

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